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ABSTRACT

These proceedings from a conference on the health needs of Asian and Pacific American (APA) children include discussions and recommendations from each breakout session. The breakout sessions focused on trends and services; K-12 education; health and mental health; child abuse and neglect services; bias crime and violence; and poverty and welfare reform. Several common themes were raised repeatedly, and various priorities were examined, including: organize youth and parents to speak out for system reform and to participate actively in program planning; hold systems accountable to becoming more responsive to APA community needs; strengthen APA's advocacy ability with better data collection, evaluation, and needs assessments on APAs; develop linkages, networks, and collaborations inside and outside the APA community that maximize resources and expertise; promote cross-cultural understanding and realities of living in a multicultural society; and strive to bring more APAs into education, policy, and health and human services professions. (SM)

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THE COALITION FOR ASIAN AMERICAN CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

A Seat At The Table:

Toward A National Agenda for Asian Pacific American Children

2000

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DHHS OFFICE OF MINORITY HEALTH REGION II

Moments In America FOR ASIAN AMERICAN CHILDREN

EVERY 13 HOURS, an Asian American baby dies.

EVERY 1 HOUR, an Asian American baby is born to a mother who had late or no prenatal care.

EVERY 5 HOURS, an Asian American baby is born at very low birth weight (less than 3 lb., 4oz.).

EVERY 45 MINUTES, an Asian American baby is born at low birth weight (less than 5 lb., 8 oz.).

EVERY 1 HOUR, an Asian American baby is born to a teen mother.

EVERY 21 MINUTES, an Asian American baby is born to a mother who is not a high school graduate.

EVERY 19 MINUTES, an Asian American baby is born to an unmarried mother.

EVERY 16 MINUTES, an Asian American child is arrested.

EVERY 7 HOURS, an Asian American child is arrested for a violent crime.

EVERY 6 HOURS, an Asian American child is arrested for drug abuse.

EVERY 2 HOURS, an Asian American public school student is corporally punished.

EVERY 1 MINUTE, an Asian American public school student is suspended.

Children's Defense Fund, "Special Report: Sizing up the Odds." CDF Reports, March 1999, Volume 20, Number 3

Introduction

In New York City, almost half of all Asian Pacific American babies are born into poverty or near poverty. Across the nation, many Asian Pacific American (APA) children are failing school, going to bed hungry, and even dying before their first birthday. Yet America still thinks all APAs are doing fine.

Clearly advocacy for APA children should be more vigorous. However, incredible ethnic diversity, scattered geographic distribution, intergenerational differences, and a socioeconomic divide complicate APA children's advocacy by fragmenting the community. While national APA advocacy efforts have addressed immigration, civil rights, health care, and political participation, they rarely focus their energies on children's services. Mainstream children's advocacy efforts often overlook APA children. As a result, there is no organized effort to speak up for APA children's rights, education, well being, and access to services.

In March 2000, over 100 individuals who work with APA children and youth across the country came together at the Children's Defense Fund's (CDF) national conference. Recognizing the need to examine APA children's needs and advocacy priorities, CDF held its first special half-day APA session. Although the majority of participants were from the New York City area, there was a diversity among panelists and participants that resulted in a unique discussion of local concerns in the national and regional contexts.

The Coalition for Asian American Children and Families and the New York office of CDF planned the session with representatives from community-based organizations (CBO) in New York City serving children and families. The opening panel was invited to speak about topics of concern in their region of the country and national implications. Breakout sessions on education, bias crime and violence, poverty, child abuse and neglect, and health followed. In each breakout session, participants were asked to identify and prioritize advocacy opportunities.

COMMON THEMES

The following chapters present the discussions and recommendations from each breakout session. Despite the diverse and broadly defined topics, several common themes were raised repeatedly. While these priorities have certainly been voiced in other APA policy or service forums, what made these findings notable was that they focused specifically on children's needs and services. The priorities include:

- **Organize youth and parents to speak out for system reform and to participate actively in program planning;**
- **Hold systems accountable to becoming more responsive to APA community needs;**
- **Strengthen APAs' advocacy ability with better data collection, evaluation, and needs assessments on APAs;**
- **Develop linkages, networks, and collaborations inside and outside the APA community that maximize resources and expertise;**
- **Promote cross cultural understanding and realities of living in multicultural society, both inside and outside the APA community; and,**
- **Strive to bring more APAs into education, policy, and health and human service professions.**

UNCOMMON CHALLENGES

The visibility of APA children's issues varies depending on the size and resources of each local APA population. In defining local needs, APA advocates need to find similarities among regions or ethnic groups that can shape a common national agenda. Based on the repetition of themes in the breakout sessions alone, it seems that most APA children's advocates face similar challenges, but they differ in degrees of intensity or urgency. For example, data collection may already be ethnic-specific on the West Coast, whereas in other parts of the country all APAs are still lumped under "Asian" or relegated to "Other/Unknown."

Much of children's policy is determined at the local or state level, with limited influence from the national level. Any advocacy movement would have to identify national level legislative issues, standards, and practices that would benefit all APA children, but at the same time strengthen local advocacy efforts. Since Asian Americans are still a

small proportion of the overall U.S. population, we can only benefit from linking ourselves together nationally to make our voices louder.

However, APA children's organizations and advocates are not well connected with each other beyond their local network. Even organizations in New York City are unsure of their counterparts in Boston, Philadelphia, or Washington, DC, despite the proximity of these cities. Advocates and well-established organizations from heavily APA populated areas should strive to share information and support those individuals and organizations in areas where the population is small or disperse.

The APA community has much work to do to correct misperceptions about our children. Many highly regarded academics, policy makers, and service providers are astonished to learn that indeed, there is substantial poverty, illiteracy, family violence, and mental illness among APAs. APA advocates need to be more proactive, and not merely reactive, when dealing with policy planning and programs.

As is often noted, APAs are undercounted or lost into the "Other/Unknown" portion of the population. This makes it difficult for APA advocates to argue that our children need more assistance or particular attention. Perhaps APA community should not continue to rely on statistics alone. Instead, advocates should strive to tell APA children's stories more forcefully and more frequently. Vignettes of a child's experience are powerful tools to changing the common perception that APA children are marginal, negligible, or expendable. When someone insists that the "Other/Unknown" children are not a priority, advocates have to be prepared to give a passionate illustration of how an unresponsive system can harm the lives of the children in need.

The recommendations call for a change in the ways in which the APA community takes greater control of its destiny. First, Asian Americans need to ensure that families get services by organizing them to demand it. Secondly, we need to get APA professionals into direct service and executive levels of health and humans service organizations.

Participants repeatedly expressed concern about the lack of APA professionals teaching or working with youth. As immigrants, APA families have traditionally sought to empower the next generation through education, financial stability and job status. What APA immigrant families have achieved in only one generation is remarkable. Many have achieved well paid, highly regarded, executive levels positions in professions such as in medicine, engineering, and computer technology.

Unfortunately, fewer APA youth enter positions in education, policy, or service fields that offer less status and pay. Without APA professionals in these fields, APA youth do not have advocates at either the planning or service delivery levels to speak out on their behalf. If there are no APAs who are working on educational standards or curriculum, the contributions of APAs to the U.S. will be easily overlooked, and children of all backgrounds will miss out on an important educational opportunity.

APA advocates have to begin to address the issues that fracture the APA community: length of time in the country, ability to speak English, education, and income and class divides. Due to stereotypes and media images, APAs, particularly those who are not living in neighborhoods in need, frequently are unaware of or deny the problems in their own community. Too many APAs proudly accept the label of the model minority stereotype, but APA advocates have to remind people that for each success story, there is an APA child who is falling through the cracks.

Generations of APAs who have found educational and economic success and have moved out of the low income ethnic enclaves should be encouraged to help the children who have been left behind. However, as APAs develop more economic success and presence in the business world, they should commit to giving philanthropically to APA children in the U.S. While APA immigrants are often willing to contribute to children's hospitals, schools, or orphanages in their country of origin, they are less accustomed to giving to children's services in the U.S.

MOVING FORWARD

However, children's advocacy is not just about the poor or recently immigrated. APA children's advocacy is about establishing a place in U.S. society for the APA community as a whole – not just one family, or one individual. Many issues affect all APA children, regardless of class or ethnicity, such as bias crimes, school curricula, intergenerational culture gaps, and ethnic identity development.

The session at the CDF conference is an important first step to encourage people in power to address APA children's concerns, and have service providers take a closer look at the APA children in their neighborhoods. Although thousands of children's advocates and service providers attend the CDF conference each year, there have historically been few APA participants and workshops. The level of interest and participation in this year's milestone APA session suggests that many in the APA community are ready to organize to advocate for children.

The Coalition for Asian American Children and Families hopes that the following summary of proceedings will be informative and useful. Needless to say, the speakers could not possibly be comprehensive in the limited time available. Their comments are intended only to begin to examine the topic areas. The recommendations are easy to put on paper, but will require time, effort, commitment, and funding to establish the networks and infrastructure to put them into action. We offer them here to inform and guide the advocates and leaders who struggle to create a society in which every child, including the APA child, has equal opportunity for health, education, and success.

JESSICA S. LEE
Executive Director
The Coalition for Asian American Children and Families

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Plenary Session: OVERVIEW OF TRENDS AND SERVICES

Panelists:
LISA HASEGAWA Community Liaison, White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Washington, DC
PETER KIANG Associate Professor of Education and Asian American Studies, University of Massachusetts, Boston
MAY TO Executive Director, Asian Youth Center, Los Angeles
WILLIAM YANG Executive Director, Hmong American Partnership, St. Paul, Minnesota

Moderator:
SUKI TERADA PORTS Director, Family Health Project, New York City

The opening panel identified issues of concern to APA communities nationally and in their respective regions. Panelists addressed poverty and welfare reform for refugees, creation of youth services, and education reform. Their local work reflects national concerns and the need to make federal agencies more responsive to APA communities.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF HMONG AMERICANS IN THE MIDWEST

Hmong Americans total almost 300,000 in the U.S. and are concentrated in the states of Minnesota, California, and Wisconsin. Contrary to common stereotypes, thousands of APA children are hungry and homeless. Southeast Asian youth in particular face multiple barriers to social and physical well being. Southeast Asian families must cope with barriers of language, trauma resulting from war experiences in Southeast Asia, and cultural and social adjustments to life in the U.S.

Welfare reform changed the lives of Hmong Americans dramatically. The complex guidelines for eligibility have created confusion and hindered access to benefits among Hmong communities. Hmong are especially vulnerable to restricted eligibility as many lack transferable skills for the market environment. In Laos, most men are farmers without experience working in an industrialized, global economy. Many did not have any formal educational opportunities in Laos, which makes learning new skills and English in the U.S. even more difficult. Refugees require much more time to acquire the necessary skills for self-sufficiency than is permitted in welfare reform.

Hmong families do not have adequate access to critical supports such as child care and transportation that enable them to work. Traditionally, Hmong have large families, which makes economic survival in the U.S. as well as compliance with welfare reform laws more difficult. One current client at the Hmong American Partnership is a woman who came to the U.S. four years ago with 12 children, ages one to 18 years old. Although she completed an English language class, she has not been able to hold down a job due to family circumstances. Her husband has a disability from war and is blind and unable to work, finding child care is difficult, and the three eldest children are in gangs. For families such as hers, welfare time limits put her family in a precarious situation.

For most refugees, the decision to flee their native country is motivated by survival; they lack a clear understanding of the new challenges they will face. Because of their situation, the Hmong require careful guidance and support as they acculturate in the U.S. However, their culture and the strength they have developed through the refugee experience can make a unique and valuable contribution to American society.

CREATING A SPACE FOR APA YOUTH IN THE WEST

The Asian Youth Center was founded in the San Gabriel Valley, California, in 1989. Before the center was founded, not a single youth organization in the area had an APA bilingual person on staff.

Over the last ten years, the APA population in San Gabriel Valley has grown by 215 percent, and 60 percent of students in the local school district are APA. Many in the diverse community experience cultural alienation and language barriers. Adults work long hours, contributing to the lack of parental support and discipline for youth.

The local APA crime rate is growing. From 1988 to 1994, the homicides among APAs doubled and became twice that of whites in the area. In Monterey Park, there are over 90 APA gangs with origins ranging as far away as

the People's Republic of China. International crime has a significant influence in the APA communities in southern California.

The youth center grew out of the need to offer young people and their families positive and educational opportunities. The center provides comprehensive youth development, employment, and health services and sponsors cultural events. A key component to their success is their commitment to collaborating with other populations in the community. About 25 percent of the center's clients are non-APA.

RETHINKING EDUCATION FOR APA YOUTH IN THE NORTHEAST

Youth development is a crucial challenge for APA youth at this time. Over the next 10-15 years, there will be a shift in the relationship between U.S.-born children and their immigrant parents in APA communities. This may result in increased generational conflicts and family disintegration. Although many immigrant parents make great sacrifices to ensure that their child will have a good education, these same parents do not understand what life is like for their children in the schools and have difficulties in guiding their children.

Schools lack the resources and/or motivation to support immigrant APA youth in the school environment or curriculum. Adult energies are usually focused on service gaps because immediate, short-term needs are not being met. Little attention is being given to long term goals such as curriculum design and structure. We need to commit to improving the school atmosphere and support for the successful socialization of APA students.

Education reform should create more equitable, comprehensive, and substantive educational standards that support the particular identities and needs of APA and immigrant students. Around 1990, education reform held a great deal of promise, particularly approaches of decentralization and holistic evaluations. Increasingly, however, education reform focuses on standards that lack substantial content. The standards define what is important to learn and to teach, but the explicit statements about standards do not include any APA curriculum.

Because the tests based on standards determine promotion, the standards have a great impact on students. At the same time, accountability is weak. An assessment of the Massachusetts high standards grading system produced a D- for equity. The system demands high standards, but it is not being held accountable to help communities of color meet those standards.

Too few APAs are going into the education field. Only one percent of public school teachers in the U.S. are APAs. The community does not encourage young people to enter the education field. Although APAs are strong about investing in education, they abdicate long term responsibility for shaping educational institutions by being absent at the leadership level.

Effective methods for educating APA children already exist, including models that are school-based, church-based, community-based, ethnicity-based, and some connected to political and international contexts. There are also many publications available on educational approaches for APA students. Implementing these programs becomes the next critical step.

Last semester, students in a course on Southeast Asians in America at the University of Massachusetts explored a full range of issues including homeland culture, war experiences, and new community development. The final project was to write a children's story with original plot lines. Contemporary children's stories for Southeast Asian American children are scarce. The stories that the students produced demonstrate what is possible to accomplish with a curriculum that supports the identities of students.

BEGINNING TO WORK TOGETHER NATIONALLY

A significant barrier to advocating for APA interests has been the lack of data on the characteristics and needs of the community. Without the data, it is difficult to measure whether the government has been serving APAs adequately.

In 1999, President Clinton signed Executive Order 13125 to create the White House Initiative on Asian American Pacific Islanders, the Presidential Advisory Commission on Asian American Pacific Islanders, and the coordination of a federal infrastructure to increase the participation of APAs in federal programs. With this Executive Order, all federal agencies will be required to put together a plan for APAs and to include CBOs in this process. The Executive Order gives APAs the opportunity to hold the administration and agencies accountable to meeting the needs of the community.

In mid-2000, an Advisory Commission consisting of 15 members from across the country will be announced. The first commission members will be seated through July 2001. Soon after, the commission will hold town hall meetings across the U.S., including New York City. A coordinating committee will be convened among the federal agencies, and representatives will attend the town hall meetings.

The White House Initiative on Asian American Pacific Islanders is seeking to create a national network that will

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promote information sharing to the best interest of the APA community. Staff will be working with CBOs and community leaders to gather as many suggestions from the field on best practices and models as possible. Their office will also disseminate information from APA CBOs to federal agencies.

Breakout Session 1: K-12 EDUCATION

Panelists:
SAYU BHOJWANI Executive Director, South Asian Youth Action (SAYA!), New York City
PETER KIANG Associate Professor of Education and Asian American Studies, University of Massachusetts, Boston
LARRY LEE Chair and Founder, Shuang Wen School, New York City

Moderator:
UDAI TAMBAR Coordinator, New American Youth Initiative, New York City

Creating positive, empowering environments for APA students requires rethinking traditional educational methods and curricula. School administrators and teachers routinely do not recognize individual APA students' needs, because APA children and young people are commonly depicted as academic superstars. For immigrant families in particular, schools fall short in understanding cultural differences and allocating resources to help parents become involved with schools. Schools, CBOs, and parents all have roles to play in rethinking curricula and support services to find new solutions to meet the needs of APA students.

ASSESSMENT AND PLACEMENT OF APA STUDENTS

School personnel who facilitate enrollment of immigrant students require training to place students appropriately. Newly arrived immigrant students are often being placed into grades based on their ages and not on previous schooling. For many, they are coming from countries in which age is not the primary basis for grade determination. American school personnel who are unfamiliar with foreign school systems may place a student by age alone.

Asian immigrant students are sometimes inappropriately assessed and subsequently assigned to classrooms that do not match their skills. For example, there is an over-referral of students to Special Education classes because their lack of English fluency is mistaken as a learning disability. Another problem is when students are assigned to English as a Second Language (ESL) or bilingual classrooms based on their country of origin, their last name, or their parents' ability to speak English – not on their own level of English ability.

School personnel should not underestimate the support that English language learners (ELLs) need in order to make the social transition into mainstream classrooms successfully. Many ELL students take classes with one another for years, but when they are mainstreamed, they lose their network of support that other ELL classmates provide. In the English-only classes, many of the ELLs are overwhelmed and frequently the objects of ridicule.

REFLECTING THE APA EXPERIENCE IN CURRICULA

The majority of curricula used in schools do not incorporate the experience of APAs in any meaningful way. While there are resources available nationally that teachers could use to enhance their current curricula, most teachers are unaware of how to access such resources, or their schools may not have the financial ability to purchase them. Additionally, teachers may be so unfamiliar with APA history or literature that they may not even recognize the need to adjust their classroom materials.

The general concepts of multiculturalism and cultural competency are positive, but flawed. The common approach starts out with a central perspective rooted in mainstream U.S. culture, looks outward and acknowledges that other cultures exist, and then seeks to incorporate these other cultures into its original point-of-view. It would be much better if differences were seen as an inherent asset.

BILINGUAL EDUCATION RESOURCES

The success of bilingual education relies on the instructors and materials. Nationally, there is a shortage of qualified teachers. In New York City, 38 percent of bilingual teachers and 16 percent of ESL teachers are uncertified.

There is also a lack of native language materials to use in bilingual education classrooms. In the U.S., teachers can more readily obtain materials in Spanish and Chinese than in South Asian languages. While these materials are available from overseas, local bureaucracy can prevent schools from importing them or approving them for use in classrooms.

APA PROFESSIONALS IN EDUCATION

APAs are a small minority of education professionals. Among candidates for masters degrees, ten percent of all APAs are specializing in education, compared to about 30 percent of all other ethnic groups. Among doctoral students, 7.5 percent of APAs study education, versus 20 to 40 percent of other ethnic groups. Professionals need to encourage more young APAs to consider education as a profession, and parents need to be more supportive of their children going into education, instead of the career tracks that are more traditional for this population.

ESTABLISHING DUAL LANGUAGE SCHOOLS

One option for creating meaningful education for APA students is establishing dual language schools. This model provides instruction in two languages with the goal of creating fluency in both languages among native and non-native English speakers alike.

This model also promotes two cultures equally. For many APA children, their home culture emphasizes behaviors that are in conflict with behaviors rewarded in schools (e.g., non-assertive behavior at home versus assertive behavior in the classroom). Dual language schools can help students feel confident in both types of value systems.

Dual language schools are also more accessible for immigrant parents. Parents with limited English feel that they cannot approach or participate in the typical school because they do not speak English well. At a dual language school, immigrant parents can be more involved in their child's education and the direction of the school in general.

Shuang Wen School in New York City is the first dual language public school in the U.S. teaching in both English and Mandarin. It also includes an after-school and summer program. Most of the school personnel are bilingual and the curriculum is bicultural, so immigrant parents feel more comfortable and parental involvement is much more successful. In fact, parental involvement at Shuang Wen is required, and many parents have become involved in the classrooms.

Enrolling a child in dual language school implies that parents see bilingualism as an asset. Unfortunately, too many immigrant parents still believe speaking their native language to a child will impede the child's ability to learn English.

IMPROVING THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT FOR APA STUDENTS

Education professionals forget that children also receive an education in power and race relations outside the classroom in the bathrooms, in the stairwells, and elsewhere in the school environment. While school administrators may not want to acknowledge or deal with this problem, creating a multicultural school requires examining the race relations throughout the school environment, not just in the formal curriculum. Parents are unaware of this unofficial education and unprepared to deal with it.

The Coalition for Asian Pacific American Youth (CAPAY) in Boston is a statewide youth-led network that focuses on leadership development of Asian Pacific American youth. When it was founded, the group was blocked by schools because teachers and administrators labeled the group separatist and failed to see the need for empowering APA students. The group had to turn to the community in order to find support.

SCHOOL-PARENT RELATIONS

Schools and immigrant parents have different views on how best to educate children. Immigrant parents were educated in radically different school systems, and therefore do not understand what role they should play in U.S. schools. In addition, schools rarely understand the cultural differences or daily lives of immigrant communities. School personnel often feel that it is the immigrant parents' responsibility to understand the educational system, and not the responsibility of the school to understand the parents.

In addition, the U.S. education system is outdated, and the school calendars do not match the realities of working parents, particularly for low income or immigrant parents whose jobs do not allow much flexibility. Parent/teacher conferences are generally scheduled during the workday when most parents are unavailable to meet. Long summer vacations create child care problems for parents whose jobs do not offer any vacation time.

SCHOOL-CBO RELATIONS

CBOs can help make a school setting more responsive to immigrant families and more relevant to the APA students themselves because their staff understand issues affecting immigrants and poor and low-income students. Methods that the panelists found successful in improving community-school relations include:

- posting a case manager at schools once a week to translate school policies and procedures for families, as well to educate schools about the culture and practices of the immigrant families they serve;
- organizing parents and encouraging them to join school leadership teams;
- creating a space for young people to talk and learn to advocate for themselves; and,
- encouraging young people to follow career paths that they normally would not have considered.

Advocates have an important role to play in educating policy makers about how policy affects APA communities at the grassroots level. Advocates should strive to actively shape education policy that affects APA youth, as opposed to merely reacting to already established policy.

CBOs can also use their contacts with ethnic APA media to reach parents. For example, asking newspapers to announce school conference schedules or when report cards are to be distributed can help otherwise marginalized immigrant parents follow their child's daily school life.

*Recommendations**

- *Advocate for more APA teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators in the system and encourage young people to enter these fields.*
- *Develop school curricula that reflect the constituent students and families and reduce emphasis on centralized standards.*
- *Create partnerships between CBOs and the local education department to improve resource allocation.*
- *Organize parents to advocate for multicultural education and to participate in school leadership.*
- *Train teachers to work effectively in a multicultural environment.*
- *Address the informal education that can lead to student harassment and an overall harmful school environment.*
- *Work toward more accurate student assessment and placement.*
- *Encourage and support bilingual teachers and increase resources for better teaching materials.*
- *Involve ethnic media in disseminating school news and promoting non-traditional career tracks, particularly those that work with children and youth.*
- *Develop a national network of APA education resources.*
- *Institute teacher exchange programs with Asian countries to address teacher shortages.*

*Recommendations for each breakout session are listed in the order that participants prioritized them.

Breakout Session 2: HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

Panelists:

LANCE DRONKERS Coordinator of the Young People's Project, Asian Pacific Islander Coalition on HIV/AIDS (APICHA), New York City

STEPHANIE KIM Policy Associate, Asian Pacific Islanders for Reproductive Health (APIRH), Oakland, California

KENNY KWONG Director of Health Education and Social Services, Chinatown Health Clinic, New York City

ROY V. TELLIS Executive Director, Nav Nirmaan Foundation, New York City

Moderator:

MARGARET TENG LEE, MD Chief, Health Resources Branch, HRSA-NY Field Office, New York City

Over the past few years, the Asian American and Pacific Islander Health Initiative of the Department of Health and Human Services has identified several national level issues in health care for the APA community. These issues include the lack of data, culturally and linguistically inaccessible services, under-representation in health research, limited representation in certain health care training programs, and the lack of APAs in senior levels and advisory committees.

However, local health advocates must continue to set their own priorities and find better ways of serving the APA community at the grass roots level. Providing effective mental health, substance abuse, reproductive health, and HIV prevention services for APAs requires an understanding of the impact of the immigrant experience on health, the need to empower youth to access care, and the importance of agencies collaborating to improve services for youth.

MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF APA YOUTH

APA youth may be significantly underdiagnosed in mainstream mental health services. Personnel who work with young APAs often report psychological problems in youth, such as hyperactivity, depression, anxiety, compulsiveness, and other conduct disorders. Statistics show that young APA women, ages 15 to 24, have the second highest rate of suicide of all race/ethnic groups, indicating high rates of depression.

A mental health diagnosis should be considered within a framework of the child and family's unique experiences. The professional should not isolate the individual and his/her problems but consider the cultural influences of the family in order to understand and explore the individual's experience. This information can help mental health professionals to reach out to both the child and the family.

Some major mental health issues among APA adolescents include stress from immigration, acculturation, and cultural identity development. First, an individual's life and experience before he/she immigrated can have an impact on his/her mental well being. Second, the stress from acculturation can cause a range of reactions from the child as well as family members. Family members may have different acculturation levels or rates of acculturation, and these differences generate conflict within the family.

Third, the development of cultural identity is a key factor for a child growing up in an immigrant family. There are several models of cultural identity formation. One such model entails the following stages: conformity to the dominant culture, dissonance, resistance or immersion, and finally introspection leading to an integrated awareness. It is important to talk about cultural identity because professionals working with children have to understand the impact that oppression and racism has on the emotional development of a child. Family members may have different cultural identities and this may also have an effect on the child. If the individual is at a particular stage in identity formation, mental health professionals can help to move the individual into a healthier stage.

There is a need for more outreach to youth and families and public awareness of issues concerning mental health. A model for improving awareness is the parent education program at the Chinatown Health Clinic. At parenting workshops, parents can discuss their needs and learn skills that can help them identify early the issues facing their children.

A coordinated or integrated service delivery system comprising mental health agencies, schools, social service agencies, churches, advocacy groups, and other networks would best serve youth. Young people already utilize services in these various institutions, and an integrated service delivery system would coordinate individual agency efforts and increase interagency communication.

ADDICTION AS AN IMMIGRANT FAMILY PROBLEM

Substance abuse and alcoholism is connected to the immigrant experience. Most adult immigrants still have strong cultural ties to their home country. Alcohol and drugs provide a method of release in countries with high levels of illiteracy, a lack of quality health care, exploitation, and poverty. For example, a national survey in India has found an increase of alcoholism by 114 percent in the last ten years, and 50 percent of people who have used alcohol have reported doing so excessively. Women are as likely to be addicted as men, but it is less socially appropriate for women to come forward to seek help.

Recent waves of immigrants include a substantial number of people with little or no education, work skills, or English language skills. Upon immigrating to the U.S., they commonly settle in ethnically isolated communities. However, when immigrants' children begin to grow and reach school age, parents must then begin negotiating and compromising with the outside world. The stress of existing in the broader social and economic environment often becomes overwhelming for the parents. Homes become battlefields where parents who speak little or no English becoming increasingly dependent on their children to become their interpreters. Intergenerational conflict occurs because children are adopting "American" values and culture, and parents feel they have no control over the children. Ethnic identity development, peer pressure, sex and dating, and other adolescent concerns also add to the crises and stress in the family.

One way to help young people is to stop the cycles of alcoholism and violence that are frequently hidden in immigrant families. Parents, as well as youth, can utilize alcohol, gambling, substance abuse, violence, or sex to cope with family crises and acculturation, and the problems commonly overlap. At Nav Nirmaan, 83 percent of the people referred for domestic violence also abuse alcohol. Research has shown that 75 percent of children who witness domestic violence continue the cycle of abuse by becoming batterers themselves or marrying batterers. Data also indicate that children of an alcoholic parent have a three out of four chance of becoming alcoholics themselves. Therefore, to prevent substance abuse by youth, service providers must also invest in intervention programs for parents.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AS HEALTH ADVOCACY

Breaking through the structural and institutional barriers to better reproductive health in the APA community requires a variety of approaches carefully tailored to the target population. Refugee populations, for example, are often isolated, lack culturally appropriate services, and share a history of colonization and displacement.

Broadly defined, reproductive health encompasses access to health care, a safe work environment, a safe home environment, and freedom from sexual harassment at work and at school. Given this definition, Southeast Asians in particular have sizable reproductive health needs. Laotians, followed by Cambodians, have the highest rate of teen pregnancy among all ethnic groups. Fifty percent of Los Angeles County's Cambodian population lives below the poverty level, which affects how they can access health care and where they work and live. In large industrial centers, many families are residing near factories and chemical refineries and are being constantly exposed to toxins that will adversely affect reproductive health and health in general. Many Southeast Asians were exposed to toxins through chemical warfare, and the birth defects in their offspring demonstrate that these toxins are still having harmful effects.

APIRH works on reproductive health by addressing the root factors and changing structural and institutional factors that affect one's health, such as poverty. APIRH promotes reproductive health through advocacy, community organizing, and participatory action research. APIRH's approach to reproductive health takes into account many factors that impact the health of a community.

Community organizing plays an important role in health advocacy because the emphasis is on gaining power for the community, developing leaders in large numbers, and working within the context of the social and economic justice movement. APIRH's community organizing initiative, the Hope Project, is a four-year long, intensive summer project for young women ages 13 to 18 that combines reproductive health education, political education, skills building, leadership development, and community and political organizing experience. APIRH acknowledges that for young women without other opportunities, or a sense of futility about the future, a pregnancy can provide a degree of power and a path to adulthood. In contrast, community organizing can provide control over one's environment and destiny, and therefore over one's health, too.

In Participatory Action Research (PAR), the community defines the research agenda and methods, and decides how the results of the research are to be used. Too often, research institutions enter a community and conduct their studies, but the outcomes are not necessarily used to the benefit the community. PAR narrows the gap between research and impact because community members are active participants and not passive subjects. This approach to research is focused on institutional and structural change rather than individual change. Instead of placing blame on the individual, PAR looks at the broader systemic problems that influence an individual's behavior.

EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE TO PREVENT HIV/AIDS

Taboo topics such as sex and HIV are very difficult to address in Asian American communities. Unfortunately, ignoring such issues has serious consequences for APA youth, who frequently do not access preventive health care. APICHA found that linking other issues of concern to sexuality helped their clients open up to talking about HIV, sexuality, and drugs.

APICHA also emphasizes teaching young people about their rights to health care and confidentiality, in order to encourage their use of health care services. For example, young people need to know their rights to confidentiality in pregnancy tests, HIV tests, and use of medication for HIV. When youth understand their rights as a patient and as a minor, they become more comfortable discussing issues surrounding reproductive health.

Health care providers should also know the rights of a minor so that they do not violate confidentiality. Professionals should not make assumptions about their APA patients based on stereotypes, such as the model minority myth, which might suggest that APA youth are "well-behaved" and not at risk for HIV, do not use drugs, or do not have sex. A health care provider must ask the same questions regarding sex and drugs they would ask of all youth.

Educational booklets specifically on the laws surrounding patient-provider confidentiality on reproductive and mental health for youth would help to inform both young people and health care providers.

FUNDING FOR HIV/AIDS PREVENTION

Organizations should resist structuring their programs to conform with the priorities of funding sources. Two years ago in New York State, a small movement among youth organizations refused to apply for funding for abstinence-based HIV/AIDS prevention to demonstrate their belief that abstinence programs alone are ineffective in lowering HIV/AIDS rates. However, some organizations did apply, which may illustrate that there was a desperate need for funding for AIDS programs in the APA community.

CBOs have an obligation to educate funders about which programs will work with which communities. In addition, service providers need to work closely with researchers and develop a strong evaluation component of programs so that chances for funding can be improved.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR BETTER YOUTH HEALTH

Because the APA population is still a very small percentage of the total U.S. population, it is not in the community's best interest to be broken up into various narrow ethnic divisions without developing creative partnerships and collaborations. Many groups are still too ethnocentric, ethnic-specific, and territorial about their communities. The larger and more established APA CBOs need to extend their expertise to newer organizations that are dealing with new immigrant communities. Creative partnerships will help create a united voice from the APA community that is not dominated by any one ethnic group.

Agencies should examine the purpose of a proposed partnership and enter only if it matches their missions. Commonly, organizations take on issues outside of their mission because of new funding streams, even though there are other organizations who have been working on these issues. This duplication of efforts leads to a depletion of valuable resources. Partnerships should also include clients in order to set priorities most effectively.

Partnerships and coordinated referrals also make the best use of the limited number of APA professionals in social work and health education. Developing pan-Asian collaborative efforts helps clients to find the help they need by increasing referrals to culturally specific programs and coordinating care. For example, physical health and mental health are treated separately, when in fact service providers should be comfortable in recognizing symptoms from both fields and in making appropriate referrals. Another example is the importance of ensuring that women have access to child care in order to access health care.

APAs have many of the same concerns as other people of color. Unfortunately, APA community members and even non-APA service providers do not identify APAs as people of color, because the model minority myth encourages a separation of the two. Rather than accept the false premises of this "divide and conquer" strategy, APAs should strive to develop coalitions with other groups in order to improve services for all children. In doing so, however, APAs have to be prepared to examine how APAs are placed in the middle of race dialogues and used as political pawns in race related arguments.

Overall, there needs to be an increase in resources that will help build coalitions, develop innovative service delivery strategies, and design new strategies for prevention and awareness.

Recommendations

- *Improve health care delivery by increasing resources, hiring culturally and linguistically competent staff, and developing linkages to create comprehensive services.*
- *Create partnerships between different Asian ethnic groups.*
- *Train youth in public policy and encourage them to speak out.*
- *Promote understanding about issues surrounding acculturation and cultural identity formation.*
- *Provide cultural sensitivity training for youth.*
- *Encourage APA youth to enter fields of social work and health education.*
- *Require CBOs to invest in increasing public awareness of health issues facing APA communities.*
- *Advocate with funders to restructure funding streams to better address community needs.*
- *Develop health research that targets the APA community.*
- *Support community organizing efforts.*

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Breakout Session 3: CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT SERVICES

Panelists:
SHU-PING CHAN Executive Director, Maryland Governor's Office on Asian Pacific American Affairs, Baltimore
SANDY DANG Executive Director, Asian American LEAD, Washington, DC
LYDIA FAN Associate, Davis, Polk & Wardwell, New York City

Moderator:
MARIA GREGORIO Psychiatric Social Worker, Queens Child Guidance Center, New York City

Traditionally, APA communities have not been considered a population of primary concern in child welfare. As a result, child welfare policies and services are rarely designed to meet the needs of the APA community. In order to create more responsive child welfare systems, we need more research on APA communities, an increase in APA professionals and foster care families, and more investment in developing the cultural competency of foster care services. In strengthening child welfare services, APA communities should be aware of how legislation and judicial precedents around child welfare affect their families.

Many steps need to be taken to enable legislators and child welfare agencies to address the diversity and the needs of the APA population. The APA community must organize to communicate with the government and child welfare agencies to ensure that their needs are understood and met. APA CBOs should partner with other immigrant communities or communities of color to strengthen their advocacy voice in child welfare. Government should be held to a high standard to improve relations with APA communities and improving child welfare services.

NEED FOR SERVICES

There is little documented information on the needs of APA families to prevent child abuse and neglect, nor on the experience of APA children in foster care. Assessment tools developed for other ethnic groups and used in research and practice are frequently not relevant when assessing the APA community. If additional funding were available, child welfare research could better address the types of services APA families need and how they access those services.

Policy makers should be careful in assuming that a low use of services is equivalent to a low need of services. Cultural values and the immigration experience have an impact on how families in crisis might access child abuse and neglect prevention services. For example, the emphasis on protecting family pride and avoiding shame may result in underreporting of certain problems. In addition, new immigrants, both documented and undocumented, are experiencing very real fear that using any kind of services will result in deportation or threaten their residency status.

CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN FOSTER CARE

There is a disproportionately low number of APA foster care families. As a result, many APA children are placed with a non-Asian family, which may have conflicting language, diet, religious practices, and child rearing values. Living in a very different culture may harm the child's development or eventual reunification with their birth family.

In addition, there are few APA professionals working in child welfare. APA professionals would help address an APA family's cultural concerns and would be effective advocates for systemic improvement. Local agencies should be funded and then held accountable to recruit and train APA foster care families and professionals.

LANGUAGE AND FEDERAL LAW

Title VI entitles the public to language specific services. It prohibits recipients of federal financial assistance from being discriminated against based upon race, color, or natural origin. It also prohibits any agency from operating programs in ways that will have the effect of discriminating based upon race, color, or natural origin. It applies to recipients of federal financial assistance, whether directly or indirectly. Therefore, the scope of Title VI is quite broad.

Title VI provides legal recourse in the struggle to improve culturally competent services within the child welfare system. This is because Title VI has been interpreted by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Office of Civil Rights to require language assistance when language barriers would cause a person with limited English proficiency to be excluded from or denied access to DHHS funded programs.

According to the Office of Civil Rights, recipients of funds from DHHS may be required to provide written and oral language assistance in languages other than English. Any social service organization receiving federal money is also required to provide language assistance. Organizations and government agencies cannot require the clients to bring their own interpreters such as family members, or to use untrained bilingual staff, such as security guards who happen to speak the language, to act as interpreters. Not providing the services in the language that the client needs is violating the civil rights of the client under Title VI.

In 1975 in Chicago, a two-year-old Spanish-speaking child was taken out of his home and put into foster care. The foster home was English-speaking only, so when the child was reunited with his birth parents two years later, he was unable to communicate with his family. A class action suit was filed under Title VI and the court found that the family's civil rights were violated. The court said that an agency must provide Spanish language assistance, and that the agency must train staff to be sensitive to people from different cultures and provide translated materials. Therefore, this case mandated, in judicial fashion, a higher standard of cultural sensitivity. Though there has not been any similar action in regards to APAs, the Burgos v. Chicago case has potential implications for APA children in foster care.

IMPLICATIONS OF ASFA FOR APAS

The federal Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) enforces stricter time constraints by limiting family reunification services to 15 months. The legislation also supports efforts to expedite adoptions and the termination of parental rights by mandating state supported termination of parental rights of a child who has been in foster care for 15 out of the last 22 months.

Given the timelines, it is more critical than ever that families have timely access to the services they need if they wish to have their children returned to the home (e.g., parenting education or substance abuse treatment). These services are very limited in general, and for APA parents who do not speak English well, finding these services in their own language is even more difficult.

UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS IN CHILD WELFARE

Undocumented immigrants face special challenges and barriers in child welfare and other services. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 restricts the participation in certain federal, state, and local public benefits to "qualified aliens" only, therefore making undocumented aliens ineligible to receive most public benefits. Federal public benefits not available to the undocumented include federal foster care payments, adoption assistance payments, and independent living services for adolescents who are aging out of the foster care system. For these federal public benefits, providers are required by law now to inquire the immigration status of those who need or request those services.

However, foster care preventive services are not under the definition of "federal public benefits," and states are not required to verify citizenship or immigration status of individuals who wish to receive child welfare services funded by particular titles under the Social Security Act. While this is state specific, New York State does not require the questioning of immigration status. In practice, however, people have been questioned about their status, and the perceived threat of deportation may keep families from accessing needed services. An individual can also access child care, foster care, and preventive care without being deemed a public charge.

The eligibility of undocumented immigrants to serve as kinship care homes depends on the status of the child. An unqualified alien foster or adoptive parents of a child who enters the U.S. after a certain date is eligible to receive payments on behalf of the child, if the child is a citizen, member of certain refugee groups, or living in the U.S. as a qualified alien for the past five years. Foster and adoptive parents are not recipients of federal foster care and adoption assistant payment.

CBOS AND CHILD WELFARE ADVOCACY

The most important role that grassroots organizations can play in changing child welfare policy is encouraging and training clients to advocate for themselves. APA CBOs have the responsibility of both serving clients and enabling them to help themselves.

Enabling community members and clients to serve as advocates includes ensuring that they have a voice in organization direction and administration. CBOs also have to be held accountable for services that are provided to

the clients, because clients will not support or trust an organization if the services are not meaningful to them.

Community advocates and leaders need to know how the system is structured and how to get themselves to a postion to influence decision-making. APA CBOs can become partners in broader child welfare collaboratives. Even though they are few in comparison to the larger, established child welfare agencies, APA CBOs still can have a large impact on the collaborative by participating in decision-making.

PARTNERING FOR ADVOCACY

Advocating as a collective is a very powerful tool. Because APAs are often only four to five percent of a local population, they do not always have the clout to bring about change alone. Developing alliances around children's rights can lead to a unified lobbying effort that benefit all families. APA organizations must make alliances with organizations within the Hispanic community, the African American community, women's groups, gay and lesbian groups, and others.

There is no national organization or alliance that focuses on child development and advocacy for APA children. National APA organizations often have different priorities than grassroots organizations. While this CDF conference is a first step, sustained communication and follow-up are critical.

ENSURING THAT GOVERNMENT RESPONDS

Only with more supporters in state and local government can the APA community ensure that the child welfare system will be more responsive. Advocates need to find key state, county, or city legislators who can speak out on behalf of APAs and are willing to form alliances.

Advocates must educate child welfare professionals and policy makers of the size and diversity of the APA community. The APA community should press for governors to require state agencies to assess the needs of the APA community, following the lead of President Clinton.

Maryland offers an example of how formally including APAs in policy making can benefit the community. The Maryland Governor's Office for Asian Pacific Americans works with different state departments, including child welfare, on the concerns of the APA community and develops proposals to the governor regarding policy changes affecting the APA community. When he established the APA office, the governor was seen as a progressive leader working with more diverse communities. While such offices cannot know everything about APA communities, they can serve to help ensure agencies are held to the standards of civil rights law, specifically Title VI, or encourage administrations to diversify their staff to reflect the population.

However, an APA office or policy should be institutionalized in law to ensure that it will be exist beyond the current administration. If not formally institutionalized, a change in elected officials may result in any gains being discarded. Unfortunately, these types of offices are used sometimes as political pawns for the executive.

Similarly, APA advocates should not settle for one-time or short-term fixes in child welfare services, such as funding for interpreters. Improvements should be built into the system so that when the terms of elected officials are over, these improvements remain intact through legislation or accepted policy.

Recommendations

- *Build a national coalition between APA grassroots organizations that can create a stronger advocacy movement, build relations with federal agencies, and learn from the experience of non-APA organizations.*
- *Increase cultural sensitivity by institutionalizing policies mandating that child welfare agencies be staffed to reflect the communities they serve.*
- *Improve funding for child welfare education, research, and service provision by generating research that demonstrates needs.*
- *Hold public officials responsible for child welfare law and regulations accountable for being aware of and dealing with APA concerns.*
- *Train clients to become their own advocates in child welfare.*

Breakout Session 4: BIAS CRIME AND VIOLENCE

Panelists:
RAMESH JAMES Senior Youth Organizer, Youth Force, New York City
DON KAO Director, Project Reach, New York City
ELIZABETH OUYANG Staff Member, Educators for Social Responsibility and Independent Consultant, New York City

Moderator:
THERESA THANJAN Program Coordinator, South Asian Youth Action (SAYA), New York City

Too often APA young people are victims of bias crime or harassment based on their ethnicity, gender, religion, and/or sexual orientation. Many immigrate to the U.S. with idealized notions of America as the land of great opportunity, freedom, and tolerance. This illusion is shattered when they encounter the harsh reality of racism and discrimination in this country. Other young people are themselves perpetrators of crime and violence. As the APA population increases, the incidence of crime and violence among youth will increase as well. Finding new and innovative ways to reduce bias crime and prevent violence among young people will require time and investment from the whole APA community.

RISE IN BIAS CRIME REPORTING

It is difficult to gauge accurately how many bias crimes are committed against APAs. Language barriers, distrust of police, inability to identify attackers, and ignorance of the laws all hinder accurate reporting of bias crime. However, since the number of reported bias crimes against APAs seems to be increasing, either incidents are increasing, or APAs are becoming more likely to report bias crime. According to the 1998 Audit of Violence against Asian Pacific Americans from the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, bias crimes against South Asians in particular have increased dramatically, going from two reported incidents in 1997 to 41 in 1998.

Although the media covers high profile bias crime cases extensively, there may be a significant number of low profile cases involving some sort of discrimination that are not labeled as bias crimes. Many bias acts do not involve serious injuries, and in general police do not allocate many resources to investigate low level crimes. For example, a group of Latino youth harassed and threw rocks at a Chinese woman, causing a minor injury. Instead of reporting the crime, her son sought out and retaliated against the attackers. Based on his experience, he felt that if he were to report the attack to police, the perpetrators would have never been apprehended because it would have been considered low priority.

UNDERSTANDING THE LAW

The above example also demonstrates how young people frequently choose to retaliate without understanding the ramifications of their actions. When youth perceive that the police are not responsive to crime in their communities, they are motivated to take the law into their own hands. Revenge and retaliation, particularly in youth-on-youth violence, tend to escalate and repeat, creating no-win situations for all the young people involved.

Youth workers and advocates need to educate young people about the limitations of the law and the ramifications of taking the law into their own hands. At the same time, police also need to be more responsive so that young people, particularly those in poor or immigrant neighborhoods, have faith in the system.

DISCRIMINATION AMONG APAS

Discrimination is not just inter-racial and inter-ethnic, but also intra-racial and intra-ethnic. Frequently, APA young people are the victims of discrimination or exploitation by other APAs, on the basis of ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic class, number of years in country, ability to speak English, etc. While some patterns of discrimination may be learned in one's country of origin, immigrants also adopt many behaviors from norms in their local community, extended family, or peers in the U.S.

RACIAL PROFILING

Racial profiling of APA young people by police and the juvenile justice system is another form of discrimination. For example, the number of arrests of South Asian youth has risen as a result of racial profiling practices by the New York Police Department's Street Crimes Unit (NYPD SCU). Any group of South Asian youth that are picked up in sweeps by the SCU are regularly labeled as gang members. Once a young person is considered a gang member or connected to gangs, the severity of their punishment increases. As a result, the number of South Asian youth who are placed in detention centers has increased rapidly.

GANG INVOLVEMENT

Being in a gang and instigating violence can give a young person a sense of control over situations that they create in an arena where they are not judged nor influenced by outside forces. Gangs provide a support system that may be lacking in schools and at home. Young people might consider symptoms of crime such as truancy or owning a gun as boosting their image among peers.

POLICE AS SCHOOL SECURITY

Young people in New York City have more direct contact with the police department, now that the police are responsible for security in schools. Many security guards have been replaced with NYPD officers. As a result, where minor infractions once would warrant a meeting with the principal and a counseling session, youth are now being arrested and sent to the station house directly.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PREVENTION

In order to combat crime and violence among and against APA youth, increased funding should be invested in after-school programs and the building of community centers. High school students in particular have few opportunities for constructive activities after classes before their parents come home. Communities commonly invest in after-school or summer programs for younger children, but do not address the limited options for adolescents. There are also very few programs designed for young people who need special and time intensive interventions, such as former gang members or young APA people who have been involved in criminal activity.

Youth centers can provide constructive activities, academic assistance, job training and transition, and supportive staff. Youth centers should be self-contained, offer comprehensive programs, and, most importantly, have a full-time staff. Such programs provide healthy alternatives to gang or illegal activity and a support system outside of gang life. Young people will feel they have a place in which they can become invested and where they are important to adults.

Ultimately, drugs, guns, and gangs are only the symptoms of deeper problems. True prevention work would also determine and address the root causes of violence and crime. These factors include a youth's sense of lack of control, non-responsive systems such as schools, threats to family well being, and institutionalized racism and discrimination that result in the outward violence or criminal behavior of young people.

Recommendations

- ***Advocate for more funding for youth centers with full time staff that provide support such as mentoring, peer education, conflict resolution, and constructive after-school programs.***
- ***Provide religious, cultural, and psychological support as well as educational opportunities for youth in correctional facilities.***
- ***Invest in violence prevention programs that address root causes of violence and criminal behavior and take into account a young person's family dynamics.***
- ***Educate youth on how to report crimes and also to have realistic expectations of the police.***
- ***Develop youth councils to involve youth in programming and policy planning.***
- ***Teach young people to change social climate through community mobilization.***
- ***Train police to understand APA communities.***
- ***Develop documentation projects within institutions.***
- ***Ensure that young people and their families have opportunities to learn about other cultures and develop tolerance.***

Breakout Session 5: POVERTY AND WELFARE REFORM

Panelists:
DAVID CHEN Executive Director, Chinese-American Planning Council, New York City
CHUNG-WHA HONG Executive Director, National Korean American Service and Education Consortium, New York City
SAMIEN NOL Executive Director, Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Association Coalition, Philadelphia

Moderator:
SU MING YEH Executive Director, Asian Professional Extension, New York City

Poverty and near poverty continue to be problems for APAs. Nationally, poverty rates for APAs remain higher than non-Hispanic whites. Although APAs do not have the highest number of families in poverty among all races/ethnic groups, there are large numbers of poor or low income families. The breakout session examined the impact of welfare reform on APA immigrants and refugees, employment assistance including job training and child care, and opportunities for advocacy.

IMPACT OF WELFARE REFORM

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, commonly called welfare reform, drastically changed the country's public assistance system and reduced eligibility for public benefits for immigrants. Since the majority of APAs are foreign-born, and more than half of the foreign-born individuals are not naturalized, the immigrant provisions of welfare reform have had a major impact on the APA community.

As a result of welfare reform, eligibility for public assistance for immigrants is based less on actual need and increasingly on other factors. These factors include date of entry into the U.S., type of disability, age, immigration status, earned work quarters, sponsor's income, and immigration status of family.

Many APAs are "mixed status" families, in which children are eligible for services or assistance, but their parents are not. As a result, parents may hesitate to apply for their children because they fear the application process will result in deportation of the whole family. Nationwide, ten percent of all children live in mixed status families. Over a quarter of children in New York City and nearly one-half of children in Los Angeles live in mixed status families. An even higher number of poor families are mixed (30 percent in New York City and 59 percent in Los Angeles). Undocumented or recently arrived immigrant children and families have very limited access to services.

At the implementation level, HHS Office of Civil Rights is working on a survey of all the application forms in all fifty states to ensure that no unnecessary questions about status are being asked. This can alleviate fears of reporting.

DECREASE IN FOOD STAMP PARTICIPATION

For legal permanent residents, food stamp participation decreased by 50 percent after 1996. Also from 1996 to 1998, food stamp participation decreased for children of legal immigrants. Among children of citizens, food stamp participation decreased only by 12 percent. Many immigrant families are being denied food stamps or fear that accessing these benefits will have a negative impact on their residency status or naturalization application.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS TO ACCESSING BENEFITS

Language and other barriers impede APAs' ability to participate in the larger society. Many APAs do not speak English well and over one-third do not speak English at all. The consequences of those barriers heavily impact survival in the welfare arena. The 1996 legislation did not address translation services and community outreach initiatives to overcome the language barrier, so there is room to advocate for these provisions.

New guidance is expected from the Department of Health and Human Services on Title VI, the language access provision to ensure that all federal benefits are made available to people who speak limited English. Title VI is not uniformly enforced, and many government agencies do not know their obligations.

OTHER BARRIERS

Many immigrants mistakenly think that accessing benefits will cause them to be labeled a "public charge" and therefore undermine their ability to apply for citizenship or permanent residency, or may cause deportation of family members. While new regulations state that use of cash and other benefits will not harm citizenship applications or family's residency status, APA communities have not been effectively alerted and educated about these guidelines.

Other barriers to accessing needed benefits or services are affidavits of support (a legally binding document in which an individual promises to financially support an immigrating relative if necessary) and benefit form questions that ask if a sponsor has received benefits in the past. These questions need to be eliminated. They also impact whether an immigrant who has received benefits in the past can sponsor other immigrants such as family members.

EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS AND JOB TRAINING

One direct impact of welfare reform has been the difference in funding allocation in job training and placement programs. On one hand, the "one stop center" model can prevent fragmentation of services. However, it can also detract funding from smaller and more specialized programs such as those that serve APAs. In addition, an increasing number of contracts are being given to for-profit companies.

Recently, there have been waves of unskilled workers immigrating. These workers have limited English speaking ability and limited education and literacy in their native language. Thus, it is particularly challenging to prepare them to work in the U.S.

The federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998 restructures programs for job training, adult education and literacy, and vocational rehabilitation. Locally, in New York City, WIA has had a major impact on youth employment programs. With more funding being targeted at year-round projects, the slots for summer jobs will decrease unless local funding closes the gap. This also means that a greater amount of funding will be targeted at youth who are out of school, which decreases the amount available for immigrant youth who are not in that situation.

CHILD CARE

In addition to job training, the ability of a parent to support their family is also heavily dependent on the availability of quality child care. The APA community in New York City faces a chronic shortage of child care slots.

Frequently, only population and poverty levels are used to plot child care needs. As a result, the needs of APA families are routinely not taken into account. For example, only APA families on public assistance would be counted, not families in poverty or with low incomes who do not receive benefits. The emphasis on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) weeds out the working poor, who rely on child care to prevent their families from requiring TANF. New immigrants have to wait five years to receive benefits, and since the APA community has so many immigrants, and so many people working in service or labor positions, these child care assessments miss the mark.

Recently, a joint assessment of child care needs by several referral programs used different set of variables to describe community needs. This recent assessment examined not only the number of children in each district and the number of children on public assistance, but also the number of children speaking selected languages and the number of children with certain types of immigration status. As a result, the assessment identified high child care needs in immigrant communities.

SPECIAL NEEDS OF REFUGEES

Refugees, because of the circumstances of their arrival to the U.S., have had a particular need for public assistance and related programs. Therefore, they present even more specialized problems when welfare reform is considered. Refugees want to work but welfare reform does not give them the tools to do so. Many refugees have problems with job placement programs, which commonly place them in jobs that do not allow them to develop skills that are more likely to keep them off welfare in the long term. Refugee communities need more investment in preventive services to keep them off welfare.

It is also very difficult to understand the changes in law and regulations. The lack of interpreters makes it difficult for refugees to negotiate the system, and there is no translated, written materials that outline the changes, the rights, and obligations of refugee families. There is a greater need for social services departments to take responsibility for this. Some APA agencies have considered lawsuits if systemic barriers continue to result in refugees being denied benefits and other assistance.

RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGE

The "Fix '96" Campaign seeks to restore some of the benefits removed in 1996. Restorations have included SSI benefits and one third of the total losses in Food Stamp benefits. Sometimes parents are denied benefits while their children are deemed eligible, but since families share meals, it still means that the family must stretch out benefits for the whole family.

Welfare reform is one of the biggest challenges that the APA community has been faced with recently. Some advocates have responded by organizing recent immigrants and registering many first time voters. There continues to be an overwhelming need for the APA community to come out on the forefront and make its presence known at decision making tables regarding welfare reform, civil rights, and immigrant rights.

Recommendations

- *Provide culturally and linguistically appropriate outreach and education on new benefits regulations and application processes to APAs and the CBOs that serve them.*
- *Play a larger role in advocating community needs and policy making at the national, regional, state, city, and county levels.*
- *Create job training that is appropriate for each community and takes into account specific needs, such as women's responsibilities, English ability, etc.*
- *Identify and nurture the next generation of advocates.*
- *Examine the strengths of the APA community to design a best practices model.*
- *Improve data collection, invest in evaluation, and conduct needs assessments to strengthen advocacy efforts.*
- *Increase grassroots participation in voting.*
- *Invest proper resources to train public agency staff in cultural diversity and new regulations particularly as they relate to immigrants and refugees.*
- *Invest in becoming proactive and not merely reactive to policy changes.*
- *Fund educational programs to increase APAs in social service and policy fields, and not merely as figureheads, and match APA professionals in community programs.*
- *Collaborate with other service providers to integrate related services.*
- *Create a volunteer language pool for agencies to draw upon.*

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